

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, TH
SUBJ: MARCH 26 COUP ATTEMPT

REF: A) BKK 6778, B) BKK 6627, C) BKK 6587, D) BKK 6584,
E) DAO IR6-895-0122-77

1. SUMMARY: COUP ATTEMPT LED BY GEN. CHALAT HIRANYASIRI FAILED BECAUSE KEY ARMY GENERALS DID NOT JOIN HIM IN THE COUP ATTEMPT. CHALAT'S MOTIVATION FOR COUP ATTEMPT AT THIS TIME UNCLEAR. OTHER PARTICIPANTS OR SUPPORTERS OF COUP ATTEMPT NOT YET KNOWN ALTHOUGH MG PRAMAN ADIREKSAN AND MC CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN ARE UNIVERSALLY SUSPECTED OF SOME COMPLICITY. PMAC AND THANIN CABINET PROBABLY STRENGTHENED IN SHORT RUN, BY SUCCESSFUL FOILING OF COUP ATTEMPT. END OF SUMMARY.

1. THE DETAILS OF WHAT HAPPENED ON MAR 26 HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN EMBASSY REFTELS AND IN THE DAO REPORT (REF. E) ON THE COUP ATTEMPT. THE BAREBONE FACTS ARE AS FOLLOWS: GEN. CHALAT HIRANYASIRI, FORMER

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DEPUTY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ROYAL THAI ARMY, ATTEMPTED A COUP D'ETAT, ASSISTED BY HIS SON, THREE OTHER FIELD GRADE OFFICERS, 300 MEN OF THE 9TH DIVISION IN KANCHANABURI PROVINCE, A HANDFUL OF SOLDIERS OF THE 1ST DIVISION IN BANGKOK, AND AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF OTHER PERSONS. THE COUP GROUP SEIZED CONTROL OF FOUR KEY MILITARY AND VIVILIAN INSTALLATIONS WITH EASE, HELD

TWO RANKING ARMY OFFICERS "HOSTAGE" AND KILLED ANOTHER. THEY ALMOST SEIZED GEN. SOEM NA NAKHON, RTA COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. THE COUP FAILED BECAUSE THE COUP GROUP WAS ISOLATED, NONE OF THE KEY ARMY GENERALS JOINED IN THE COUP ATTEMPT. DAO REPORTED IN REF. E THAT THE POTENTIAL FOR SUCCESSFUL COUP WOULD HAVE BEEN ENHANCED IF THE COUP PLOTTER HAD SEIZED GEN. SOEM AND HAD NOT KILLED GEN. ARUN.

2. WHY CHALAT ATTEMPTED A COUP IS THE SUBJECT OF A MITUDE OF THESES, MANY OF WHICH ARE OUTLINED IN REF. E, NONE OF WHICH WE CAN DEFINITIVELY ASSESS AT THIS TIME. CHALAT WAS VERY AMBITIOUS AND WIDELY ACKNOWLEDGED TO HAVE ACTIVELY PARTICIPATED IN COUP PLOTS OVER THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS. HE HAD BEEN THWARTED IN HIS ATTEMPT TO BE IN LINE FOR THE RTG COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF POSITION WHEN HE WAS REMOVED BY THE NEWLY INSTALLED SENI GOVERNMENT FROM THE POST OF DEPUTY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE RTA TO WHICH HE HAD BEEN UNEXPECTEDLY PROMOTED IN APR 1976 BY THEN MINISTER OF DEFENSE MG PRAMAN ADIREKSAN. SHORTLY AFTER THE OCT. 6, 1976 COUP, THE NATIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM COUNCIL (NARC) PLACED HIM ON RESERVE STATUS BECAUSE HE WAS SUSPECTED OF COUNTER-COUP PLOTTING. SOON THEREAFTER CHALAT BECAME A MONK AND TRAVELED WIDELY TO VARIOUS MILITARY INSTALLATIONS, GIVING HIM A GOOD OPPORTUNITY TO SEEK SUPPORT FOR A COUP ATTEMPT.

3. WHO ELSE WAS INVOLVED IN THE COUP ATTEMPT IS DIFFICULT TO ASCERTAIN AT THIS TIME. DAO SOURCES ARE CONFIDENTIAL

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CONVINCED THAT NEITHER PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIAN NOR THANOM KITTIKHACHON, FORMER STRONGMEN WHO WERE FORCED INTO EXILE IN 1973 AND WHO ONLY RECENTLY RETURNED TO THAILAND, WERE INVOLVED IN THE ATTEMPT. GEN. PRASOET'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE ATTEMPT IS COVERED IN REF. E.

4. MANY STRONGLY SUSPECT MG PRAMAN ADIREKSAN, LEADER OF THE NOW DEFUNCT THAI NATION PARTY AND HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW, MG CHATCHAI CHUNHAWAN, PROVIDED AT LEAST HEAVY FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO CHALAT. CHATCHAI AND CHALAT ARE CLOSE ASSOCIATES; BOTH CHATCHAI AND PRAMAN HAVE BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH CHALAT IN THE RECENT PAST. IT WAS PRAMAN, THEN DEFENSE MINISTER, WHO IN THE LAST DAYS OF THE LAME-DUCK KHUKRIT GOVERNMENT, PROMOTED CHALAT TO THE POST OF DEPUTY COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE RTA.

5. CHALAT COULD NOT HAVE EXPECTED TO PULL OFF A SUCESSFUL COUP WITHOUT SUPPORT OF AT LEAST SOME

RTA GENERALS IN KEY POSITIONS AND WOULD NOT HAVE ATTEMPTED A COUP WITHOUT SOME ASSURANCES OF THEIR SUPPORT. CERTAIN GENERALS PROBABLY WERE APPROACHED AND INDICATED THAT THEY WOULD SUPPORT CHALAT ON THE CONDITION THAT CHALAT GET CERTAIN OTHER GENERALS ON BOARD AND PROVIDED ADEQUATE PAYMENTS. THESE ASSURANCES OF SUPPORT WERE PROBABLY MADE THROUGH AIDES OR GO-BETWEENS AND HENCE PRACTICALLY UNPROVABLE. PMAC LEADERS MAY ALSO SO CIRCUMSCRIBE THE SCOPE OF THE ON-GOING INVESTIGATIONS THAT ONLY A FEW OF THOSE INVOLVED IN THE MAR 26 COUP ATTEMPT, AND NONE OF THE PRINCIPAL SUPPORTERS, WILL BE UNCOVERED AND BROUGHT TO TRIAL.

6. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THE SUCCESSFUL FOILING OF THE COUP ATTEMPT HAS STRENGTHENED THE PRIME MINISTER'S ADVISORY COUNCIL (PMAC) IN THE SHORT RUN. THE MEMBERS OF THE PMAC HUNG TOGETHER WELL IN FACE OF A DANGEROUS

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CHALLENGE A SERIOUS TROBLEMAKER AND EMINENT COUP PLOTTER HAS BEEN EFFECTIVELY ELIMINATED. IT ALSO APPEARS THAT RTA COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF HAS ENHANCED HIS IMAGE AND HIS PRESTIGE AMONG THE MILITARY AND THE PUBLIC AT LARGE FOR HIS COOL, DECISIVE HANDLING OF THE SITUATION. THIS IN TURN HAS STRENGTHENED THE HAND OF THE SANGAT-KAMON-KRIANGSAK-SOEM GROUP IN THE RULING PMAC. THE EMBASSY ALSO BELIEVES THAT THE ATTEMPT MAY HAVE PROVIDED THE THANIN CABINET WITH A LITTLE MORE BREATHING ROOM. THE SANGAT GROUP, REALIZING THAT A MAJOR RESHUFFLE OF THE CIVILIAN CABINET SOON AFTER A COUP ATTEMPT WOULD WORSEN THE INVESTMENT CLIMATE AND PROJECT AN IMAGE OF AN EVER UNSTABLE THAI GOVERNMENT, MAY DECIDE TO POSTPONE ANY PLANNED RESHUFFLE.

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